INTERNATIONAL LONGSHORE AND WAREHOUSE UNION

PACIFIC COAST PENSIONERS ASSOCIATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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DARRYL TSEU OF ILWU ALASKA LONGSHORE DIVISION

INTERVIEWEE: DARRYL TSEU

INTERVIEWERS: HARVEY SCHWARTZ, CONOR CASEY

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HARVEY SCHWARTZ 00:00:16
Good afternoon. This is Harvey Schwartz, and I'm with Daryl Tseu, is that correct?

DARRYL TSEU 00:00:22
That's correct.

HARVEY 00:00:23
And with Conor Casey, and this is an oral history that's gonna go forward. Today is the 15th of October, 2025. Darryl, can you tell me when you were born, where you were born?

DARRYL 00:00:37
Okay, I was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, in the Territory of Hawaii, February 14, 1958.

HARVEY 00:00:47
Okay, and you're not retired, but you're close, right?

DARRYL 00:00:51
I should, yeah, I should be retired.

HARVEY 00:00:53
Okay, but you're still active for the moment.

DARRYL 00:00:56
Still an active member.

HARVEY 00:00:57
You're right on the borderline, okay. Can you tell me a little bit about your parents' nationalities, jobs, politics, unions?

DARRYL 00:01:05
Actually, my family's quite a little bit interesting in that respect. My father was actually born in Hong Kong, and he was transitioning from his father. So it kind of goes back to my great grandparents who left China--well actually, my great grandfather left China to kind of be more like a missionary for Chinese immigrants throughout the Pacific. Their goal was to get to Brazil, where there was a substantial group of Chinese immigrants working there. So he and his brother left China, theoretically, to remind the Chinese immigrants that they had to maintain that they were coming back to their families and to live the righteous life, I guess, as a Christian. They ended up--one ended up in Tahiti, my great grandfather ended up in Hawaii. My grandfather then was born there, and then he ended up going to school in New York University, going and after getting a degree in business, he felt that it was right for him to go back to China to find a bride. And so that's how he met my grandmother. And he and my grandmother were trying to immigrate to Hawaii. It took him a little while, and so my father ended up going back and forth. They were kind of stuck in South China, ended up in Hong Kong, and that's where my father was born. And then they ended up taking a Matson ship to Hawaii from Hong Kong. My mom's side is actually Japanese. They came to sharecrop in Kauai, on the island of Kauai in Hawaii as sharecroppers for sugarcane. And that's how they got there and started, and that's kind of the background for my family.

HARVEY 00:03:06
Can you put a few dates on that?

DARRYL 00:03:08
Jeez, a few dates! I think talking about the eighteen--probably somewhere like 1880, 1898, something around there, when my great grandparents, grandfather was traveling through the Pacific. I think my father was born in 1937--no, '32, 1932. So he was old enough, I guess, to endure the Depression in the 1930's as a child.

HARVEY 00:03:46
Why did your grandfather come back to Hawaii?

DARRYL 00:03:49
Well, his family was there. My grandfather ended up actually graduating from college, going to China, meeting, his wife, my grandmother, and then eventually trying to move the family back. But during that period of time as well, he also ended up enlisting with doing World War One and fought in France with the US Army. So it's kind

of a long story, but they eventually got everybody over to Hawaii, which is what the game plan was, and that's how we all kind of got started in Hawaii.

HARVEY 00:04:24
What did your grandfather and your dad do for work?

DARRYL 00:04:28
My grandfather, it's kind of interesting. I think in the army because he wasn't white, he couldn't carry a rifle. All he was given was a side arm. More or less, he dealt with the staff and the camps, so I think he did a lot of cooking, and he was also the bugler for his division. So that's kind of where his history lies. Coming back, he opened up a business, a furniture business. And then I unfortunately, never got to know more about what he did as far as that was concerned. When it comes to my father, he worked and ended getting into the military as soon as he graduated from high school, and then coming back, going to college, ending up with a finance degree, working for a a bank, and then eventually with insurance. So that's kind of his background. And then later on as a real estate broker.

HARVEY 00:05:28
Okay, any politics, any unions, anything?

DARRYL 00:05:32
Well, you know, that's a good thing, interesting thing about it. My father was kind of a very conservative individual, was very vocal about his displeasure about organized labor. And as a child, I kind of grew up that way. I recall only looking for jobs that were non-union, jobs in the restaurants and anywhere else. My first opportunity to work in a union shop was with the Dole pineapple cannery, and I was able to realize how important our organized labor was at that time. I was a teenager in high school and realized that there was some power in the ILWU [International Longshore and Warehouse Union], I just didn't understand it. I mean, as a child, I grew up delivering papers like a lot of kids in my age group, read a lot about the ILWU as things went on, because it was always in the news back in the '50's, '60's and in the '70's, for sure. So that kind of gave me a little bit of understanding about the union.

But more or less, my mom ended up as a school teacher, was part of the teachers union in Hawaii, didn't say much about it. So I was kind of left to my own devices, and I pretty much, like I said, looked for jobs that were outside of union representation, until I got to Alaska, and then realized that when I went to work for the ferry system as an IBU [Inland Boatmen's Union] member, that I didn't have much of a choice. And I think it was a great learning experience for me. And I always look back on my union upbringing, if you may say so, as being a born again union person. I learned more about it as an adult and learned to go with the value of it, and maybe that's why I'm so much more maybe emotional or feeling strongly about it, because I've seen both sides.

As a manager, working in management at hotel restaurants as well as restaurants, I learned the value. And I think that's one of those issues. I always thought, as long as an employee is a good employee, they will be treated fairly and the bad employee will be treated justly. And I realized then that that is not necessarily how it always works. As a manager, I remember having people saying, they're asking-- it was an HERE [Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees] member, and saying, "Why do we even join the union, Darryl? I'll be paying dues when you treat us fairly." And I said, "Well, it's still important because I'm not going to be here for the rest of your career probably. I'm only here for a certain period of time. And I may be a good manager, but there may not be good managers in the future, and I think you need to think about that." So that was kind of the message I brought to when I was still working in management.

HARVEY 00:08:29

Very helpful. Just the language, I missed a bump there, just to be sure: so your dad was anti-union, essentially?

DARRYL 00:08:39
Yeah, he was anti-union. And I think I remember being in high school or younger, and a guy coming over to our house, talking to my dad, and I asked him, "What was the guy here for?" And it was like, I can't remember the name of the society, the John something?

HARVEY 00:09:00
John Birch Society?

DARRYL 00:09:01
John Birch Society. And I was like, "What is that?" And so I had to look it up and realized that it's an ultra conservative organization, and I had no idea. So it kind of made my eyes open a little wider in understanding.

HARVEY 00:09:15
Got it, yeah. What about your own schooling, that sort of thing, background?

DARRYL 00:09:20
Okay, my own schooling. Well, I always wanted to be a teacher, I thought my plans were to be, and realized that there was a lot more issues involved in that, and I decided to just go into business. So business management was kind of my speed. And then I went ahead and didn't finish college. I ended up just dropping out, but ended up working and finding my way through education, through the education that way taking community college courses and understanding more about business management, and that's kind of where I came from.

HARVEY 00:09:55
Where were you going to college when you went there?

DARRYL 00:09:58
I went to, actually a little known school in Hawaii called BYU [Brigham Young University]. Spent a year there, and then I went to Kapi'olani Community College, which is a community college out of the University of Hawaii programs. Then I--Oh, I could mention George Meany, because I ended up going to George Meany for a couple of union classes when I was with IBU.

HARVEY 00:10:25
What was your first job with an ILWU-related group? Was it with IBU?

DARRYL 00:10:29
Yeah, with IBU. I worked on the ferries, and I think that was a very defining moment for me, because I had an anti-union attitude. The state of Alaska gave a new probationary employee three years to join the union. I was an underachiever, and it took four years for me to finally get my initiation out of the way, me complaining about it from the beginning to the end. I remember very distinctly a member named Dave Strangio, who was an able-bodied seaman on board the ship, and I was mouthing off in the crew mess, and he came to me and he said, "You know, Darryl, you keep on whining about the union, but why don't you step up and do something to make it better?" And I think that really, really hit me hard, and I was like, you know, you have so much, a huge impact on me, and I want to go out. And even though Dave did pass away from cancer, he always was somebody that I hold dear to me because of what he challenged me with, and what brought me to where I am today is all because of him, and I really appreciate him stepping up and saying it in a nice way, just quick, "Make it better then, if you don't see anything good about it." And that's kind of the model that I've always lived with for over the last twenty years as an ILWU member, and I think that's the way it should be.

HARVEY 00:11:58
What was his name, again?

DARRYL 00:12:00
Dave Strangio was his name.

HARVEY 00:12:03
How do you spell that?

DARRYL 00:12:05
It's actually Dave, and then Strangio is S-T-R-A-N-G-I-O.

HARVEY 00:12:11
Got it, okay. Anything else about your early life, like were you in the military, or any of that sort of stuff?

DARRYL 00:12:19
No, I was there just when I became eighteen, two months I think after they did away with the draft. And I was looking at a time back in the '70's where I wanted to be my own person, nobody can tell me what to do, and I want to live my life the way I choose to, right? And I think that kind of kept me out of the military, [laughs] because I wanted to do more with myself. And I think looking back on it, I wish maybe I did, but I didn't. But I think, you know, I made the choices of working my way up through the ranks, starting off as a--I think I started off my first job as a dishwasher, and worked my way up to the kitchen staff, and then going into restaurant management in Hawaii, and then eventually moving to Alaska, doing the same thing here in restaurant management. I've always relied on food services as a way of moving around the country if I needed to and finding work, because it was very easy. Most people are always looking for a good cook, and so I could feel that niche, if I needed to.

HARVEY 00:13:32
Are you still in food services now?

DARRYL 00:13:34
No, not anymore. I am at home, I'll be honest with you. My wife appreciates that I cook more than she does at times.

HARVEY 00:13:45
How did you get from Hawaii to Alaska?

DARRYL 00:13:48
That's always a good question. And I always go back, and everybody rolls their eyes when I say it, but it was actually following a girl up here. I met her on the Big Island in Hilo when I was working there, working in the restaurant business. I was actually, I think I was bartending at the time and cooking, and she ended up being a cocktail waitress. And she mentioned that there was a job that her parents were looking for somebody for a friend, to help open up a restaurant in a small town called Haines, Alaska, and I thought it was a great opportunity, since I was in love with Jack London and all his books. I read every single short story and book that Jack London wrote, because I was so intrigued by the Yukon and Alaska and San Francisco, too. So then that kind of got me involved, and I said, well, what better offer than to be able to get a chance to spend a year or two years in Alaska and find work and get to experience it, with every intention of me going back to Hawaii and living again. And that was in 1985. So unfortunately, I never made it. I made it back for visits home, but I never

made it back to live. So it's something that I fell in love with, Alaska, fell in love with the people. I love the state, love everything about it, even some of the politics, which may not be good, but it is still part of the experience of being here.

HARVEY 00:15:23
Tell us a little more about your wife or the girlfriend, because it's a pretty interesting individual there.

DARRYL 00:15:30
Yeah, it is. Well, you know, she kind of traveled a lot. Her parents actually were old time Juneau families during I guess in the '40's, '30's, '50's. So she actually came from a bar family. Her father owned the bar in Juneau, and she moved around from California, Seattle area, and then eventually to Hawaii, following a boyfriend there, and that's where I met her. And she mentioned to me about the jobs that were available, and she wanted to go back up and visit her mom and dad. And I thought, well, I'll just come and join you. So that's kind of how it started.

HARVEY 00:16:14
Is she Chinese in background?

DARRYL 00:16:16
No, she's actually Irish. That was kind of one of the larger groups of immigrants, were Irishmen that came to Alaska for the new opportunity. I think that's where a lot of them came from.

HARVEY 00:16:34
Did she have any political background?

DARRYL 00:16:37
I don't think she had any. She has always been more on the you know--she was a little older than me, so definitely of the hippie age. She graduated in high school in 1966, I think, so that was, I think, her kind of mindset about politics and life: live and let live and everybody be your own people.

HARVEY 00:17:01
Any union?

DARRYL 00:17:02
No union work, per se.

HARVEY 00:17:06
Okay, right. How did you end up getting into whatever aspect of the ILWU you finally got into?

DARRYL 00:17:19
That one's another good story, too, Harvey. So there's me opening my mouth and complaining about the union, and I decided to run for office, because that's what I was--if I'm going to do anything to make a change in the union, kind of have to be there. So I ran for office with the IBU, first as a executive committee member or board member. I think my first election was as vice chair because I didn't know where else to go. I eventually then ran and became regional director of Alaska, which then, at the time we had about 750 members and five different bargaining units. So it was kind of a good lesson and education for me to understand how little I knew about unions and how little I knew about the history of the ILWU. I thought I kind of knew it being born and raised in Hawaii, but there's so much more of the impacts when it comes to San Francisco, the West Coast, and not only in Hawaii. I'm still learning more about Alaska and how the ILWU started here. So I think that was kind of where I was looking at. As an IBU member, I could see the touches and how unions impacted communities,

how we could make things better for the industry at large. I mean, even with ferries, you know, transporting property and people, it goes within non-union and union, and I think just understanding that process and thinking about safety and being all the things that you care about in a bargaining unit, as far as the collective bargaining agreement, those are kind of things that I thought was really important for a community that I belong to.

HARVEY 00:19:16
You're in the IBU, what are you doing for work when you're in the IBU?

DARRYL 00:19:20
In the IBU, pretty much we represented unlicensed people on the Alaska Marine Highway System, as well as Washington State Ferries, and of course there's also the San Francisco ferries as well. So we represented, IBU, represented all the stewards, unlicensed engineers, deckhands, anybody below an officer, and pursers. So there was quite a divergence of different types of people and their needs and desires and what they wanted out of a contract. So it was a great learning experience for me to realize how wording could negatively affect a portion of your burning unit, even though it may benefit others. I think that was really a good experience for me to realize how to bridge the gap of helping people understand what we may have to do to achieve something in the future. And I think, you know, we try to set up a game plan. When I was with the IBU, I felt really important that our executive board had kind of a future game plan that went past a three year term. And I thought that that's kind of where we needed to go as an organization, is start planning what do we want to see in the next ten to fifteen years, and kind of take baby steps to that process to achieve those things. And I think that's kind of where my mindset has always been, and I think it has benefited the union in that respect. So as a union--and so that's kind of where I worked. I worked all the departments before getting elected as a regional director. I worked the stewards department for a couple years, ended up in the engine room, did a couple stints as a deckhand, and then finished up my career on board the vessels as a purser. So that kind of gave me a well rounded, I guess, experience about working on the ferries, which then gave me a lot better insight into how our members looked at things in a certain way.

HARVEY 00:21:41
One connection that's not quite been made, I think: how did you go from working in the bar for your girlfriend's relatives, from there to get onto the ferry system? How did that--

DARRYL 00:21:58
Yeah, so what happened with that was I ended up going to Haines, loving it, love the people. And if I may just diverge a little bit, I thought I was in Mayberry only because there was like, I could run a tab in every single business in town. People knew who I was. And I think the turning point for me staying in Alaska was me going to the grocery store without planning it, because they didn't have to. My keys are always in my car, my front door was always unlocked, and my wallet was always in my jacket pocket. I grabbed the wrong jacket, went to the grocery store, had about $150 worth of groceries and no way to pay for it, and the cashier just hit cash and gave me the receipt and told me to put my name on it and put it on a bulletin board. And I was like, I could not believe that she was going to tell me to do that. Says, "You know, you don't even know who I am." She says, "I've seen you in town. You're good as new. Just put your name on it and pin it on the bulletin board and come back and pay when you can." And I thought, man, if that's the way that life is in this town, I probably could live longer when there's no rush hour traffic. People trust everybody, and everybody does the right thing. And I said, "This is the place for me." And so that's kind of why I decided to stay in Alaska.

Eventually, once the restaurant got going, I ended up moving down to Juneau, which is the capital, even though it is a smaller capital with 32,000 people, it's still a small town. Found my way through the restaurant business, as I usually would, found a job, eventually becoming a food and beverage manager of a hotel. It was at that

point where I had some friends that were working on the ferries, and they would look for jobs in the winter, because they know they were having jobs in the summertime, and then in the winter, they would run with less vessels. So then a lot of people would get laid off. And so I ended up as a restaurant manager hiring a couple of them to fill positions during the winter. They talked to me about it and said, "You know, we really could use somebody like you on the ferries. I think you should apply." And I went through that decision and decided to go ahead and do it because of the benefits that the union provided, you know, retirement and health care and all that. And I think that's kind of where it started. That's how I got to the IBU.

And then as the regional director, I made a lot of friends with a lot of other business agents and other union leadership throughout Alaska. I developed a good relationship with actually a Teamster BA, and we ended up being good friends, and we'd share things about the community and what was going on, and how we work together with our Central Labor Council and all that. He mentioned to me that he was doing a tie-up for the longshoremen. And I was like, "Wait a minute, you're tying up the ship and you're a Teamster?" I said, "That's kind of interesting." And he goes, "Well, you know, they needed help, and they asked me to come down, and I helped them." So I went up and talked to the dispatchers and the officers of the ILWU Unit 16 that's here in Juneau, and I said, "Anytime you need somebody, you know, my office is in downtown. If you need somebody to come in a pinch, I can come down and help, because that's the kind of way I am." I mean, I'd said the same thing with Local 200 who is just the ferry workers, I mean the medical staff here at Bartlett Hospital. So I was always trying to maintain ties with everybody, and eventually ended up working maybe less than forty hours in one year, the next year a little bit more. And then eventually, at the end of my term with IBU Regional Director, they had an opportunity for me to be a casual and then later on as a registered person. So I ended up moving up the ranks that way.

HARVEY 00:25:55
What year was that?

DARRYL 00:25:57
Oh, I think it was like I started in 2006 or seven, was when I left the IBU, and then ended up slowly going, making my way through as a casual and I think as a B card with ILWU.

HARVEY 00:26:14
What was it like working longshore? Can you remember jobs?

DARRYL 00:26:16
Yeah, I can remember some jobs. It was relatively new for me, and we had the old docks hinge, you know, where there was no winches available, and so everything was done by hand, like the old days. And I think that really helped me respect the guys that came before me, as well as how hard their work was, not understanding all the history of it. So that was kind of interesting. Like, I think I look back on old records, and I think there was at least two hundred longshoremen in Juneau back in the '40's, so there was a large group of people working throughout Alaska as longshoremen. That's something that's been of interest to me, is to go and find out more about our history in Alaska, and I think it's important for our current membership to rely on the past, as far as learning things, what we did and why we do things that we do.

HARVEY 00:27:13
Can you describe the work as a longshore worker early on?

DARRYL 00:27:16
Yeah, early on I was doing more like putting gangways in with forklifts. I was pulling lines in as a casual. And then once we started a new program, which we called it a utility program, we realized that our officers in the

ILWU Unit 16 longshore division realized that a lot of the cruise ships were doing their own cargo, and the customs agents realized that that is not acceptable, because they were working on US soil. We got together and develop a utility program, we called it, where we'd have a ILWU longshoreman standing by each ship that came to Juneau, and if they needed anything loaded on board, we were there to help. And then moving gangways. And so that's kind of what I started doing, was going up and down the docks, changing gangways with the tides. And in Alaska, as some of us know, the tides can get up to least 22 feet differences. And so there's a huge change, and sometimes a day would be changing. If there's a really big title change, we'd be moving gangways pretty much most of the day.

HARVEY 00:28:30
Did you ever have any difficulties or confrontations with the ship owners?

DARRYL 00:28:37
Oh definitely, yeah. There was a lot of distrust. And I think because of the company, the cruise line agencies, which is the agents for the ship, even though they're our sister company with the stevedoring company that I work with, they didn't want to see us out there, because they looked at us as competition. So it was a very difficult time for all of us to work together and try to figure this all out. So now it's been I guess almost eighteen years, maybe fifteen years, all together. And so things have kind of gotten a little better. I have moved up into the [?lines?] board now as people retired. So that's kind of where I am now. But the program, the utility program that I came up through, is still going pretty strong. We have four registered people doing that job, along with a bunch of red line casuals that are there. They kind of find a decent amount of work, maybe. So they can kind of handle it for the summer. It's a good summer gig for them, so there's hours enough there. We're looking at seeing some expansion, as well. Juneau is kind of an intermediary port, which we can have up to five to six cruise ships in a day, which is very unusual for--I think the only other town may be Ketchikan, but they don't have the the amount of cruise ships coming in at the same time as Juneau.

HARVEY 00:30:11
Do you have a story about an incident at one time when you guys were charged with something, you had to protect your jurisdiction or whatever?

DARRYL 00:30:24
There was a lot. I mean, we started doing things like because we had a company, the ship agents were trying to keep us off the docks, and we had to fight them as well as the cruise ship employees, and it was really difficult. So we had--and I guess I came to understand the cruise ship industry is kind of like a bully. They just assume that they can do whatever they want, wherever they go, and it works pretty well. Their kind of attitude works well in third world countries, but it doesn't work really well in a country like the United States. And so that was where our issues had.

I think one of the more colorful moments we had was a ship coming in, and they dispensed like probably about fifteen officers. They all went over to Costco and bought every single pillow that Costco here in Juneau had to bring to the ship, because they needed to replace their pillows. They came back with like about fifteen cabs all filled with pillows, and they called out about thirty crew members to come out and do a chain to load them back on the ship. And we came back with Customs and said, "You guys can't do this. This is a US job. You need to hire US people. We have a program here, the utility program, and you need to adhere to this. And either you use the utility workers, US workers, or we're going to fine you." So they ended up agreeing, but we ended up, I think, loading over a thousand pillows. I don't know how many pillows it was, but it was quite a huge amount. It took us about about three hours to get it all loaded on, especially when security wanted to--because of our issue of US workers loading the pillows on board, they wanted to screen each and every pillow one by one, so we had a metal detector for each pillow, and that took us forever. They thought, well, we'd just get tired and bored with

it, but we just kept at it. And I think that kind of was a defining moment for a lot of them, when they realized they can't fight it. There were a couple times where they tried and they got fined. I mean, a person can lose their ability to get off the ship if they are found to be liable for trying to sneak things on and off the ship without the help of the agent or the ILWU utility program.

HARVEY 00:32:53
That's great. At some point, this is, I guess, as good a point as ever. Can you describe the change over to Unit 16 and to the Alaska Longshore--What's your unit now? Alaska Longshore Division. And all of this comes, as I recall, out of Local 200 around fifteen, twenty years ago. Can you describe that? You spoke about it a little bit before we started recording.

DARRYL 00:33:26
Oh, okay, yeah. So I kind of came into the--as an IBU member, I said I've got to get involved. So the first thing I did as an ILWU member when I became registered as a B card, was to run for an office. There'd be somewhere that can start doing things. And I became a Local 200 longshore representative. So I represented the division, Alaska Longshore Division with Local 200. I attended a couple of their conventions, reported on the longshore. So I had to deal with our longshore officers to pass along the information to Local 200. During that period of time, there was some maybe disagreement on where the local was going, where Local 200 actually benefited from the division, Alaska Longshore Division, because of our fee structure and dues structure, the majority of their funds came through from the Longshore Division. The challenge, I think, at the time, became with Local 200 holding the purse strings and not wanting to spend money on certain things that maybe the division wanted to, thought they weren't necessary. And I don't recall all of it, I'm thinking it was something to do with education, maybe with organizing, and things like that, of that nature, that we had a hard time getting funds for. And that ended up with a lot of the leadership in the Longshore Division, saying, "Maybe we need to get out of this arrangement with Local 200 because they don't see eye to eye."

They do hold the purse strings because they have more members because of their structure. They were able, I think, at the time, we had maybe 170 members, maybe two hundred at the most. And Local 200, the medical unit, had over three hundred. So whenever it came down to a vote, they would always win. But I think because they were a quasi-public entity, their union membership was kind of very loose in definition. So if you did not have more than twenty-five hours, I think--I'm kind of guesstimating. It was a certain hour limit that if you did not work more than that hour limit, you can still be a member, but you didn't have to pay dues. And I think that's where the Longshore Division had an issue with saying, "How can you have members that can vote and decide how to manage our union, and yet they don't have any money involved in it?" And I think that's why the Longshore Division decided that it would be in their best interest to separate and become their own local.

HARVEY 00:36:22
But that you didn't get a number?

DARRYL 00:36:24
No, we never got a number. And at this point, I don't really remember. I was still actually in IBU at the time when that happened, because we still do have two IBU longshore ports, and that's how I kind of got involved with the ILWU, representing them through negotiations. When we sat at the big table, I sat with the longshoremen, and I represented my two units of Valdez and Homer as IBU ports. Most of the ports went to ILWU back in the '80's, just Valdez and Homer decided to stay with IBU at the time.

HARVEY 00:37:06
Were you at the big table in 2024 for the 2022-23 negotiations?

DARRYL 00:37:14
Yes, I was.

HARVEY 00:37:15
You were?

DARRYL 00:37:18
Uh-huh. Actually 2022, I think we ended up in '23, but the contract goes from 2022 to 2027.

HARVEY 00:37:26
Yeah. What was that experience like?

DARRYL 00:37:32
It was a long one. I mean, I think we went through--I think part of the challenge was that we tried to negotiate right at the end of COVID, and I remember our last meeting was at the hotel was the first time that COVID got reported in Alaska. There was a pilot coming from an Asian--we call it cargo flight, and he ended up contracting COVID in Asia, came to Anchorage and ended up not feeling well, and then he had to admit that he had COVID while he was at the hotel. So I think was back in, yeah, early 2020. I remember that. And so we kind of went back and forth until 2022 on a very remote basis, trying to get our contract together. It takes months, and it's something that's really hard for a lot of people to understand, that Alaska is so, so vast. You got what? I think the state of Alaska holds about one third of the area of the continental United States. So traveling around and meeting is definitely a challenge, and so we spent a lot of time away from family and our homes, and spend a lot of time in negotiations for two weeks and a week at a time, kind of much like what the international does with PMA [Pacific Maritime Association].

HARVEY 00:38:59
You fly around in those little airplanes?

DARRYL 00:39:01
Not necessarily too much. You want to get to a smaller town, yes. But traveling from Anchorage to Juneau, we can take an Alaska Airlines flight. So that's kind of how we get around.

HARVEY 00:39:14
Tell me about the experience in negotiations, particularly in the period when Willie Adams was president if the ILWU, and the negotiations are going on 2022-23. I know it lasted a long time. What was Willie like? What was it like working under Willie or with Willie?

DARRYL 00:39:33
With Willie, you know, we tried as much as possible. I think we understand that Alaska has had a history with the international and it hasn't always been good. Looking back at the history of some of the news articles and realizing that we weren't the favorite child of the ILWU family on the coast, I think there was a wildcat strike that cost the international some money. And I think that's something that we're definitely aware of, and we try to maintain our ability to take care of ourselves as much as we can and not rely on the international as much. I mean, so when we need the help, we can come back and ask for them.

And you know, the officers at the international have always been a great benefit to all of us in Alaska, understanding the challenges that we have. We have a lot of the same employers as the coast, and so sometimes we can glean some information, and we try to follow suit with how the big table negotiations go, and then how it may affect ours in Alaska. So I guess we all are kind of the same way as Hawaii, we have our own separate

agreements, though we are still kind of tied with the same employers, a lot of the similar employers. I think we take a lot, we ask them a lot of questions, and they're very supportive of our efforts. They've always had a good line of communication between our officers in Alaska and the international, as well as other locals, 19, 23 we definitely have a good relationship with. We try to maintain our relationships with all the locals that are close to us in Washington and Oregon and also ILWU Canada. I think we have maybe a closer relationship with them as well, because of our locality and how close we are. And as an Alaskan, I look back now that I've been here for almost forty years, I think we have a lot more in common than I guess the Yukon or BC [British Columbia] have in common with the rest of Canada and Alaska has with the lower 48, per se.

HARVEY 00:41:49
But you were in the big table, the big negotiations for the coast longshore contract?

DARRYL 00:41:55
Oh no, we don't, because--

HARVEY 00:41:57
You're not at the--

DARRYL 00:41:58
No, we're not at the big table because we don't--none of our issues are resolved. We have our own pension. We all have our own trust. I mean, so we have our own contract. We try to go along with the coastwide contract as much as possible, trying to maintain parity with wages and benefits and all that. So that's kind of where our guideline is. We follow them, and they can give us a little bit more insight. But for the most part, we do our own negotiations.

HARVEY 00:42:28
So have you had any relationship at all with Willie Adams?

DARRYL 00:42:34
Yeah, we always have. You know, I think he's been up here a couple times. We always appreciate having any of our officers come up. We hold our caucuses usually in October, at the end of our tourist season and before our busy fishing season, and that's kind of when we have our guests. All the presidents and vice presidents and officers have all been up here at one time or another as guests or fraternal delegates. I think we appreciate it as much as that our membership gets to see how important the ILWU is. And I think a lot of times, when you're in a remote area, you might feel like the organization you belong to is not really something that you can really depend on, because you don't know much about it. And I think that's kind of our mission as a union leadership in Alaska, to educate our members to understand exactly what the ILWU is all about, and to realize that we're not very different than anybody anywhere else in any other port on the coast or in Hawaii, and we need to stick together. I think that's the whole idea for me.

HARVEY 00:43:43
That's good. Do you remember what Adams said when he visited you guys?

DARRYL 00:43:47
Jeez, I can't remember word verbatim, but all I know is like support and that they'll always be here for us. I think that's something we always appreciate. When we have issues, our president and our officers will communicate with what now currently is Bobby [Olvera], but back then with Willie. We were definitely utilizing all of our assets when it comes to getting as much information as possible. So that's been kind of a--it

started off with Big Bob. But for the most part, I think we all understood this is where we need to--that it's also much of a value to have access to our officers.

HARVEY 00:44:32
Did you guys have anything to do with the 2023 strike that was in Canada?

DARRYL 00:44:38
No, we did go down and support them. I think our president Dennis Young and I went down to Vancouver, BC, went to all the bargaining units, went to all the picket lines, talked with a lot of the officers, and actually made some connections. And actually, it was a great opportunity for us, and I wish we had the ability to bring more people from Alaska to see exactly how this all works, because it was really an impressive showing that ILWU Canada had, and that would [have] such an amazing impact on some of our membership. They could see the power of what a union really can do.

HARVEY 00:45:17
Oh, that's nice, yeah. You go to the PCPA, you've been the last few years. Why do you go to the PCPA?

DARRYL 00:45:25
That's a good question, Harvey, but I really like the people there. I look at it, the PCPA, as being the cream of the cream, right, the top of the top. The guys who are most of the leadership--well, most of the members of the PCPA were, at one time, leaders, and I think that's the reason why I respect them so much. They actually live the embodiment of what an ILWU member should be. And I respect everything, all the knowledge they have. I think that's where I've always been, is that if I'm going to learn anything more. Life is all about learning and improving, and there's so much that the PCPA membership has to offer that I really enjoy being there, because they have a great insight, and their stories about how things were kind of help how things should be hopefully in the future. And if I can be an asset to the future leadership of the ILWU, that's where I want to be as well. So I'm kind of looking forward to being a member of the PCPA because of that. I just--I don't know how to say it. I just love them. Every single person I've interacted with has made me feel so welcome, even though I am a guest. But the stories and their belief systems and the reasons why they're where they are, it means so much more to me. And their sacrifices, all of us current active members can appreciate, should appreciate all the sacrifices they made for us.

HARVEY 00:47:09
If I get it right, you're fairly close to sixty years old?

DARRYL 00:47:14
Actually, I'm closer to 68, but...

HARVEY 00:47:17
I got it. I made a mistake with my arithmetic. So you're fairly close to being a PCPA member, then.

DARRYL 00:47:28
Oh yeah, I should be. I always tell people I was retired when I was twenty till about 27 when I didn't have a goal in my life. [laughs] But I had a good time. So then I'll say now I'm paying for the price of my seven years of retirement when I was twenty.

HARVEY 00:47:48
Let me ask Conor, do you have a question, Conor?

CONOR CASEY 00:47:54
Thank you for the question. I think one of the perennial ones I ask is--and I'm sorry if I missed you answering this--but can you talk about your participation or your local's participation in international solidarity actions such as that the ILWU often engages in? You mentioned the thing about supporting ILWU Canada. I guess I'm thinking about things like in the past that relate to some international solidarity, things such as about military regimes or other social justice causes.

DARRYL 00:48:28
No, we haven't done much in Alaska I think maybe as we should. That's a good point, Conor. I think--and I quite frankly don't--I think it has to come from our local leadership to get more involved in it. And I think sometimes we feel like we're kind of out of the way. And Alaska being kind of an interesting state with a wide range, you know... I think as far as my history line goes, I think Alaska was a Democratic state back in the beginning, before it became a state. With the bringing in oil, we ended up getting a lot more people coming in from Texas and Oklahoma that also brought their politics, and from the Midwest. And then it slowly turned into more of a Republican type state, where right now, as it is now currently. And I think, you know, perhaps that's a good call for us to be more active. As a local, we're kind of young in that respect, and a lot of our membership may not totally understand all the issues that the union supports, and I think that's probably the reason why we really haven't done as much as we should. And I think that's a good point that we might have to bring up with our current leadership and maybe let them, the future leaders, understand that we need to be more active in those kind of issues. We do a little bit, but more on the local level when it comes to Alaska politics, but nothing on the national level, that I can remember.

HARVEY 00:50:18
Is there anything big that I missed? What did I miss?

DARRYL 00:50:21
I don't know. I feel like I'm kind of jumping around, and I don't know if I answered all your questions. I'm trying as much as possible.

HARVEY 00:50:30
You did really well. Conor, what else do you have?

CONOR 00:50:34
Yeah, I don't have anything else. I've just been really interested in listening to these stories.

DARRYL 00:50:44
Yeah, there's a few more that we can talk about later, maybe.

HARVEY 00:50:50
What would they be?

DARRYL 00:50:51
Well, you know, I think back now, and I guess because in dealing with IBU, it was a very diverse group of membership, and because of the work schedule where you're away from home half the year, I think a lot of times the membership, when they get home after being gone for a week or two weeks or three weeks, you don't want to do anything about work, which also means anything to do with the union. And so that was always been a challenge, you know, with people going, "Hey, there's a union meeting." And I think those are kind of issues. Like I remember when Costco came and called me and they said, "Hey, you're union, and we want to get more membership," when they first moved into Juneau and said, "Can we sponsor a membership meeting?" And I

said, "What do you mean?" Says, "Well, we'll bring treats, door prizes, and we can tell a little bit about being a Costco member, and we don't care, we'd love to do that." And I said, "Okay." So I called my administrative assistant and some volunteers in, and we called every single member to please come to this union meeting, because we're going to be hosted by Costco. Unfortunately that day, I ended up having, I think, five members show up at our meeting, two of which were there only because they wanted to file a grievance. So I was thinking like, you know, I am feeling so devastated going, I can't even get free food and free hats and free gifts for people to come to our union meeting because they just don't want anything to do with work or the union. So I think that was a good challenge for me in understanding that sometimes you got to do more to get people involved.

I think that's something that's always been a challenge for me now in my position as secretary treasurer, is how can I motivate our membership into seeing things the way I do and being more involved? And I think that's involving, and I guess we go back to--I always like to call it internal organizing. A lot of times our members don't really understand. I came to that fact, and I think I mentioned it to a couple people this year in our port. I said, "In Juneau, we have a small group of guys here, but if I asked each and every one of them what the ILWU meant to them, I would think I would get maybe seven, eight different answers." And that to me is not a good thing, and that's maybe a job that I need to work towards, is have everybody understand it.

I guess one of those defining moments was that we had an issue about trying to take a look at increasing our membership roles in our unit here. And the discussion came up, and a couple of members said, "No, we don't want any new members. We don't need them. We have enough work. We can take care of ourselves." And I voted for more members, and they got really mad at me, and they said, "Why would you do something so stupid as to limit your income source by allowing more membership?" And I said, "Because I'm thinking--" and I didn't think about it, because they told me I was really stupid for doing so. And I said, "Well, I'm sorry, I didn't think about me. I was thinking about the union, and I was thinking about our members in the future, and that's why I made the decision I made. It wasn't because of me personally. My personal decision was no, I want to keep my income the same, but as a union leader and as a member that cares about the ILWU, I want to make sure that the union is going to be here in the future, which means I need to be supportive of the membership from ten years, five years from now, to twenty years, thirty, forty, fifty years from now. I want to be able to say that I made the right decisions that helped keep the ILWU strong."

HARVEY 00:54:54
That's great, thank you. Thank you very much. Anything else, Conor?

CONOR 00:55:01
No, just thank you so much for your time, and thank you also for being willing to experiment with that title slide thing.

DARRYL 00:55:07
Yeah, Conor and Harvey, thank you so much. And I feel kind of like I don't really deserve the interview because I'm not that special, but I really appreciate--

HARVEY 00:55:17
You are special. Everybody who is a contributor to the degree you are deserves to be interviewed.

DARRYL 00:55:26
Yeah, well thank you so much. And I don't know if you got a chance to talk with Steve. I gave you his email.